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“Insecticide Choices on the Wane”

The days of loading up the sprayer every time a pest problem is seen are coming to an end. Environmental, health and other concerns are resulting in fewer pesticide choices.

Dursban, for example, is a goner - as far as its use by the homeowner is concerned. Earlier this month, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the manufacturer of dursban agreed to stop production and phase out of all home, lawn and garden uses of this widely used pesticide.

According to an EPA news release on June 8, the agreement will halt the manufacture of chlorpyrifos, also known as dursban, by December 2,000 for nearly all residential uses. Prior to that time, virtually all residential uses will be deleted from existing product labels, including home lawns. In the short term, existing chlorpyrifos products may be used according to label instructions.

Locally, dursban has been one of the most commonly used products for controlling chinch bugs, mole crickets and other lawn pests. It is also one of the few insecticides with long enough residual activity that it can be recommended for the control of wood boring insects in shade trees.

Stay tuned for more announcements concerning the loss of other lawn and landscape chemicals. I know of two more currently used insecticides and one fungicide that will also likely be taken off of the market soon, or their uses will be very restricted.

It is becoming rather obvious that we, as gardeners, need to second look at how we control pests and be more judicious concerning the use of pesticides. With the loss of these and other products, it's time to learn to manage insects, diseases and other pests, rather than trying to eradicate them with chemicals every time. The “shotgun” approach, or killing every critter in the landscape that bugs us, is a thing of the past.

Rather, there are some basic cultural practices and “least toxic” spray options, that if properly applied can help to control, or manage, pests to an acceptable level.

Following are some suggestions:

- Avoid excessive fertilization and watering practices that encourage fast, succulent growth of grass, flowers and shrubs. Lush growth attracts pests and results in the need for more spraying.
- Inspect the landscape each week in order to detect plant damaging insects and diseases in early stages of their development.
- Spot treat only affected areas of the lawn and only other plants that are affected. This method, as opposed to a blanket spray of the entire landscape, helps protect beneficial organisms.
- When a pesticide must be used, choose the “least toxic” product that will do the job. For sucking pests such as aphids and spider mites, insecticidal soap provides control. Scales can be controlled with spray containing horticultural oil. There is even a superfine oil product that can be used during hot weather. Many caterpillars can be controlled with a biological spray containing *Bacillus thuringiensis*. It is known as B.t., and is sold under trade names such as Dipel, Biotrol and Thuricide.
- Give natural control a chance by setting a threshold of how much damage you are willing to tolerate before a treatment is applied. Commercial growers of cotton, peanuts, corn, as well as nurseries and vegetable growers are now using this technique. Known as Integrated Pest Management (IPM), the idea is to wait as long as possible while beneficial organisms increase to a level that they can control the damaging pests.
- Consider removing species of plants that require frequent applications of pesticides.

Question of the Week: I would like to root and grow some Catalpa trees so that I can grow my own fish bait. How can I root them?

Answer: Catalpa worms feed only on the tree of the same name, and are among the finest of baits for bluegills and channel catfish. They are the larvae of a large delta winged sphinx moth.

Rooting catalpa trees is easy. In November, as soon as the leaves have fallen, take 8 inch long cuttings from the past summer's growth. Stick the cuttings deeply in a moist sand bed or in pots, leaving only about 1 inch of the stem above the sand or potting mixture. Keep the medium moist during the winter. Rooted cuttings can be carefully transplanted during late spring of the following year or left in the rooting bed for transplanting in the fall. Good fishing!